

We live by the Word of God

“Go and make disciples...” It’s the drumbeat of Co-Mission.
‘Going’ is always the difficult bit. However it is increasingly necessary in London. Because London’s non Christians don’t know many Christians. So the ‘come’ invitation only reaches a very few. And once we’ve shot our bolt with colleagues, family, and friends, we’ve got no one left to say ‘come’ to.

So how to get Christians and non Christians together with gospel purpose?

Going to their homes is one way.

It’s the worst way! Building friendships slowly where trust grows and Jesus is commended by life as well as lip, comes high on the list.

But if vast amounts of London don’t know any sane Christians at all, this may be the only way. And if it’s the only way, then it is the best way to reach them.

So how do we do it? Not the way the JW’s do it.

The gospel links speaking truth with love (Eph 4:15). JW’s have no truth.

And they have no love – there is no interest in the person they visit.

Their game plan wouldn’t change if you were a cardboard cut out.

Here’s now we do it in Becontree. Don’t do it like us. Your version will be better.

But what we do may spark off an idea or two to experiment with.

Our mission statement is to visit every home in our area, to explain the importance of Jesus and to encourage each other to joyfully follow him.

And before we meet as a church, we go out visiting as a church.

Overview

1. On the Thursday before our Sunday visits we deliver a letter to about 30 homes to say we’ll pop round on Sunday. It’s written with a smile and is often read with a smile. People have wanted to meet us after reading it. Well, some have.
2. On Sunday we have lunch together and then go out to those 30 houses. Generally 50% are out. 25% say ‘get lost’ (some quite nicely!). And we have a chat with 25%. We carry a little notepad in which we record ‘out’, ‘no’ or ‘yes’ next to each house we visit. (If ‘yes’ – we jot down details of the conversation). We then return to our church centre and debrief. Everyone gives a detailed report back on how we got on. I type madly as much of it as I can.
3. On Monday I go back to my computer, look over the ‘yes’ conversations, and draft a ‘thank you’ or ‘Q’ card. I then copy it out by hand onto a card. I’m strange, so I use a fountain pen... and it’s the one time I write legibly.
4. I then return to each home, knock on the door and tell the person we appreciated the chance to meet them and give them the card to say thanks.
5. On Tuesday evening we return to the ‘outs’ and it’s still the same ratio of response. But meet more because it’s a different time. The feedback & Q card system is then repeated.

The Conversation

Usually it goes something like this.

"I hope you received a letter saying you'd get a knock on your door at about this time. This is it. We're from a local church but we're not out to yank you off to church. We just want to get to know people in our area.

Have you lived here long?

And so we launch into our 3 F conversation.

It's actually a handy formula for any conversation with a newcomer in church, the man on the train, the new contact at a party...

F1 – Facts. If you ask a factual question you are more likely to get an answer. If people are asked how long they've lived in a place, it's an easy reply... and you're on your way. That question of course opens the way into other 'supplementaries'. If they've only just moved in, where did they live before? What made them move? It may be possible to ask if it's handy for work... and what work they do?

It'll be great to ask them how they chill.

Innocent enough. But the discerning Christian will spot the idols people live for in their answers.

F2 – Friends/Family. 'Do you have close friends & family nearby?' This is where you discover the extent of their relational base. 'Who do you turn to when the bomb goes off?' When asked with a smile, the answers are revealing.

F3 – Faith. 'You'll know we're from a local church. Being nosey, have you ever gone to a church or have you avoided them like the plague? What do you think about God and stuff? What do think will happen to you when you die? Stand by for some daft answers. But it gives you the opportunity to say something useful. The simple ambition is to give people a bigger view of Jesus than they have. And that can still be done in question (rather than preachy) form. "If you're saying there may be a God but you're just not sure... are you saying if there's a God he's not that good at communicating?

Might it be that it doesn't suit us to think he's vague because we don't want to hear what he says?

You're into a discussion now... you are allowed to point out the flaws as you respond.

It's Acts 17-esque because we're simply asking people not to think of God the way they do because it's illogical and untrue.

Depending how you go, you can invite them to come to church if they'd like to.

We've sometimes invited someone and they've come that evening!

We've offered to read the Bible with some... and been accepted.

The Card

It takes me about 30 minutes to write. That's why we only visit 30 houses – because 7–8 'Q cards' is about all I can manage in a week. Now we've got 2 of us doing it, it's easier.

Again, someone unimaginative like me needs a formula.

It starts saying 'thanks'.

"Thanks for being friendly to name & name on Sunday. They told me they really enjoyed meeting you and finding out a bit about your family."

It goes on to be affirming in the light of whatever they've said.

"It was really impressive to hear you put the hours in at work, and then run a football club twice a week. You must sleep well."

It goes on to be thought-provoking – again in the light of whatever they've said.

"It seemed as if God isn't that important to you. And yet if he made you, loves you, and has given you everyone and everything you have, he is actually more central to life than we might think. And it'll be unendingly sad to meet him when you die if you have lived mostly as if he didn't exist."

It ends with an open door.

"Please keep the contact details on this card and get in touch whenever you like. We'd love to be friends."

Gently does it.

But it is a personal tract written in response to a personal conversation so we can be gently direct.

You bet it'll be read. Sometimes it's kept. We had a lady come to church after receiving her card which she kept on the mantelpiece for a year while she summoned up the courage to visit.

And one thing's for certain, whatever the reaction, the Lord Jesus will be glorified when he returns as each person will see he reached out to them.

Sometimes it is possible to write a card for someone who said 'no'.

A young woman told me one Sunday she was busy and didn't want to talk because so much bad had happened in her life.

I knocked on her door with a card the following Tuesday. It simply said 'there was something you said that made me write... You said bad things had happened. It is hard to hear that and not to care. I know you must find it difficult to trust anyone after you've been hurt. But please keep this card and get in touch, we'd just like to be friends.'

When I gave her the card she waved me away without reading it saying she was still busy. 5 minutes later she was tracking me on the street to apologise and to ask for a time we could meet.

So any excuse to write a card is cheerfully acted upon.

The great thing about a Q card is that it helps us to clear away any confusion left by the doorstep conversation – and you get to say the thing you forgot to say!

The consequences

To return to the beginning, we want to be disciple-making-disciples. And we're finding it is possible to go... not to a few, but to everyone.

We're not an elite group of silver-tongued evangelists. We are tongue-tied and lack confidence. But we sure won't get better using that as an excuse.

And it's a great training ground. Those who are reached this way think that's what churches do when they join us – and we aren't about to tell them otherwise. Those who will struggle to talk can ride shotgun (we go out in pairs). They don't need to say anything, just leave that to their partner until they feel confident.

Some don't even speak English but can still be useful. Once I visited a Muslim lady with one of our Iranians. She smiled and said 'you won't get me, I'm a Muslim.'

I smiled back and said 'This is Javid – he was a Muslim.'

"Ah," she said the smile fading, "you've made him a Christian have you?"

"No" I said still smiling and pointing to someone on the other side of the street – 'That's Faramarz, he helped Javid to become a Muslim because he used to be one too.'

It's fun.

There are no instant results and it is slow work. Those who come don't usually stick. But a few have and the church has grown with locals coming to us from our estate. We usually discourage transfers, so all you've joined us did not go to church.

But even if we've only had 1 conversation, it's still one more person who has heard about Jesus who would not have done otherwise.

And at the very least people know the name of our church better than any other church on the block.

And in the course of 3 yrs we've visited 4000 houses and handwritten nearly 1400 Q cards... 1 in 3 houses have had their own gospel tract.

And a couple have become Christians.

Now it's worth saying that we also run a Toddler Group, English Language class, and youth groups – so this isn't the only iron in the fire.

But it keeps our Christians prayerfully evangelistic. It also helps a large council estate to meet a Christian in London. And for many, it's for the first time.

BECONTREE CHURCH

The church on your doorstep



Team Leader: Mike Reith

(Please reply to the address at the bottom of this letter.)

Friday 23rd May '14

Dear Resident,

It's strange getting unexpected letters, and I especially want to apologise if you have a notice saying you don't want any leaflets through your door!

But we aren't selling pizzas.

We're a few Christians starting a new church on the estate, and we're simply wanting to get to know people who live here.

We're aware that some have few friends.

We're aware that in London it is probably wise to be suspicious of strangers.

We also know people are fed up of religious groups pretending to be friendly, but who only want to get their pre-packaged message across.

We'd like to be different. We would just like to get to know you and to talk about the things neighbours talk about to each other.

We think it'll be great to create a culture of friendliness in our area.

People say it's attractive to live in a village because everyone is friendly.

Why can't it be like that on our Becontree estate?

So we aren't coming to get you! (to come to church)... just to get to know you!

(If you want to know we do meet on Sundays – at the Dawson Centre, 330 Hedgeman's Road, RM9 6BX @ 5:30 pm.)

We're planning to knock on your door between 2 to 3:30 this Sunday.

It may be that you want to see us as much as you want to see the dentist!

In which case please email me or text me or phone me (contact info below), and we'll leave you alone. We don't want to be pests.

If on the other hand, you'd quite like us to visit you, then it may be worth contacting us so we put you at the top of the list. We are planning to visit the whole of your street, so can't talk long... and it may be that we have so many conversations that we don't get to you at all. Sending a quick 'come to us' message in advance means you'll jump the queue and we'll come to you first!

We look forward very much to seeing you soon.